THE IMAGE OF MODERN KOREAN WOMEN IN THE WRITINGS OF PAK WANSŎ

Marian Suciu
PhD Student, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Abstract:The study analyses the image of modern women in the fictional and non-fictional writings of one of the most notable professional female writers in South Korea, Pak Wansŏ (1931-2011). In the first part of this paper we will examine the shift from the traditional and obedient woman to the new Korean female model, according to Pak Wansŏ's point of view in her autobiographical novel Who Ate Up All the Shinga?. Afterwards, in the second part we will try to understand a traumatized Korean woman, who was raped during the Korean War, by referring to Pak Wansŏ's story Three Days in That Autumn.

Keywords: Korean Female Writers, Women's Education, The New Woman, Pak Wansŏ, Abortion.

Starting with the beginning of the twentieth century, Korean authors were inclined to write in a realist style with the intention of depicting the daily life of ordinary people, the tragedy of Korea's division and their national traditional roots. Also in this period "professional women writers appeared in Korea […], but only since the late 1960s have they noticeably grown in visibility and numbers. In fact, the number of women writing professionally has increased so sharply that by the 1990s conservative male literary critics and writers were complaining that Korean literature was inundated with young women eager to publish"[1].

The foundation of Korean women's literature was established during the hard times of the Chosŏn period (1392-1910), when common women did not have access to education and their main purpose in life was to take care of the household and respect the "threefold obedience"[2] law. Thus, during childhood a woman had to respect and obey her father, after marriage her husband and after his death, her son[3]. But yangban women[4], unlike normal women, "were taught han'gŭl, the phonetic Korean script, since it was believed that women could benefit from reading simple rule books designed to convey complicated ideas"[5] and some of them[6] even managed to leave a legacy of simple, but profound works.

The concept of the "new woman" appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, when the reformers started to support the elevation of women's status and the paradigm shift from chaste, obedient women to educated women who were able to serve their nation better, as wise mothers

[1] Helen Koh, "Women and Korean Literature", in *Getting to Know Korea: Resource Book for K-12 Educators,* ed. Katrin A. Fraser, The Korean Society, New York, 2002, p.35.
[2] Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation,* State University of New York Press, Albany, 2006, p.92.
[3] *Ibidem.*
[4] The wives of the elite class of men.
[5] Helen Koh, *op.cit., p.*35.
[6] Here we need to mention women artists like: Shin Saimdang (1504-1541), Hŏ Nansŏrhŏn (1563-1589) and Lady Hyegyŏng (1735-1815).

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)

and good wives[7]. During that period, educated woman such as Na Hyesŏk (1896-1948), Kim Myŏngsun (1896-1951) and Kim Wŏnju (1896-1971) became the first professional women writers and the pioneers of feminist movement[8].

As a consequence of women's integration in the Korean educational system during their childhood, illiteracy was eradicated, and many professional female writers started appearing, but their work has been praised only since 1960[9].

Among the most notable East Asian postmodern and contemporary female authors, Pak Wansŏ is "held in high esteem by both the literary establishment and public for her skill as a story teller and for the wit, compassion, and incisive social criticism"[10]; although she is very little known in the West.

Pak Wansŏ, one of Korea's most respected realist writers, "was born in 1931 near Kaesŏng, just north of the 38th parallel which has divided the two Koreas since 1945"[11]. In her childhood she was a direct witness to the violence caused by the Japanese Empire[12], which annexed Korea in 1910 and transformed its territory into a battlefield where the patriotic and heroic Koreans fought against the Japanese oppressors and their collaborators. Also, as a young woman she had seen and experienced the brutalities of the Korean War (1950-1953)[13].

On 25 June 1950 she was admitted to the nation's best college, Seoul National University, because she was very intelligent and had an educational background that was to her advantage. However, when her brother and uncle lost their lives, she had to interrupt her education and start working in order to support her family[14].

Pak Wansŏ was first published in 1970 at the unusual age of 39. This was peculiar, because most popular professional writers started by winning prizes at a young age[15].

She wrote mainly realistic novels and stories, with the intention of transforming her prose into a mirror of the lives of ordinary Koreans[16] from the Colonial period (1910-1945), Korean War and the industrial period (1953-1990). However, unlike other authors, she did not make a faithful representation of the period, but wrote reliving her own experience from that age.

In one of her interviews she said that her writing was like sharing a part of her pain with the readers and this helped her feel freer and lighter[17]. We can understand from her statement that she was relieved to share her memory about the period of Japanese rule and the Korean war, because she knew her writings were the testimony of a surviving witness and would become important moral lessons for the readers, especially for the youth who had not lived during those times, as they should be taught about the pain their ancestors experienced in order to have a free country.

---

[7]Helen Koh, *op.cit., p.*35.
[8]*Ibidem,* pp.38-39.
[9]*Ibidem,* p. *40.*
[10] Stephan J. Epstein, Introduction to *Who Ate Up All the Shinga? : an autobiographical novel*, by Pak Wansŏ , Columbia University Press, New York, 2009, p.vii.
[11] Kyung-Ja Chun, Introduction to *My Very Last Possession and other stories by Pak Wansŏ,* by Pak Wansŏ , M.E. Sharpe, New York, 1999, p. vii.
[12] Stephan J. Epstein, *op.cit., p.* x.
[13]Shin Junebong, „Interview", *list_Books from Korea,nr.* 5/2009, p. 29.
[14] Kyung-Ja Chun, *op.cit.,* p.vii.
[15] Helen Koh, *op.cit., p.*40.
[16] Kyung-Ja Chun, *op.cit.,* p.*vii.*
[17]Sung-eun Jang, „Beloved Korean Novelist Dies At 80", *Korea Real Time*, January 26, 2010, accessed August 19, 2013, http://blogs.wsj.com/korearealtime/2011/01/26/beloved-female-novelist-died-at-80.

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)

Through her stories and novels, Pak Wansŏ tried to expand the awareness of women's issues. She emphasized them by writing about the following topics: women's social isolation in *Butterfly of Illusion* (1995), the reflection of the institution of marriage during the military dictatorship in *Thus Ended My Days of Watching Over the House* (1987), the image of the traditional woman in *Granny Flowers in Those Heartless Days* (1978), the problem of the relationships between Korean women and American military men in *Encounter at the Airport* (1978), rape and abortion in *Three Days in That Autumn* (1980), and the image of the modern woman in *My Very Last Possession* (1994)[18].

Other important themes that can be found in Pak Wansŏ's stories are: the conflict between tradition and modernism in *Mr. Hong's Medals* (1983) and the Korean diaspora in *Farewell at Kimpo* (1974)[19].

In her autobiographical work, *Who ate up all the Shinga?*, Pak Wansŏ, who usually writes on the edge of reality, "draws […] [its story from] the often unreliable medium of memory"[20] and afterwards fills the missing parts with "the mortar of imagination"[21] in order to create the realistic picture of a pioneer woman model and the hardships she had to go through.

From the traditional woman to the new modern woman

Although the differences between modern Korean women and their medieval counterparts are not many, in Pak Wansŏ's autobiography we can clearly see that modern women obtained some rights that helped them get economic independence. She emphasized that modern women, the so-called "new woman", could go to school, study, get a job, read Western literature and be, to some degree, similar to a man.

Who ate up all the Shinga? begins with Wansŏ's childhood, which is marked by her grandfather, a yangban, who let her wander about the hills surrounding the house in order to eat various plants and fruits, like "sweetgrass, wild rosebuds, mountain berries, arrowroot, bindweed root, chestnuts, acorns, and shinga"[22]. On the other hand, her childhood is marked by her mother, who wanted to transform her into a "new woman".

Shinga[23] is not only the plant eaten by the little girl, but also the symbol of the lost freedom of childhood, which she experienced in the process of feminine development, because women are not born as women, but become women[24]. The rhetorical question in the title, *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* has a metaphorical meaning that can be understand as a questioning of the beliefs of radical feminists. These people think that modern women live better than medieval women but forget that having the right to abort a fetus my cause moral issues, and that by promoting equal rights, women from democratic countries end up having to work and raise their babies by themselves. In addition to all these changes, we could also add that today's corporations are faced with an economic crisis; therefore, many prefer not to accept employees who take one- or two-year maternity leave.

[18]Kyung-Ja Chun, *op.cit.*, pp.x-xiii.
[19]*Ibidem*
[20]Stephan J. Epstein, *op.cit., p.* xii.
[21]*Ibidem*
[22] Wansŏ Pak, *Who Ate Up All the Shinga? : an autobiographical novel*, trans. Yu Young-Nan and Stepham J. Epstein, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009,p.16.
[23] Edible plant that can be found in South Korea; its Latin name is Aconogonon alpinum.
[24] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, David Campbell Publishers, London, 1993, p. 281.

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)

Right from the initial paragraph, Wansŏ notices the generation gap between two periods in time: the years of her childhood and her adulthood. She remembers that in her youth she "used to go around with a runny nose […] [and] all kids were the same […], [but now when she] became a mom, the thing [she] found most remarkable about [her] kids was that they never had a runny nose unless they had a cold"[25]. She also recollects that, when she was little, paper and cloth were "hard to come by […]. [And] as the snot got down to […] [her mouth, she'd] swipe at it. By the end of winter, the edges of [her] sleeves would be clothed with a greasy black layer, like thick ointment"[26], while today's children have handkerchiefs to use when their noses are runny from a cold.

Children, girls in particular, were different not only from today's generation, but also from Chosŏn's generations due to various reasons. On one hand, her generation had to endure the suffering caused by the Japanese occupation and the Korean struggle for unification. On the other hand, in her time, girls were endlessly encouraged by their mothers to learn in order to become similar to modern, westernized women, who represented the so-called "new women". Unlike then, young Korean women are advised by today's mass-media to turn to plastic surgeries and countless cosmetic products in order to become trendy women[27], able to attract wealthy husbands with their appearance. Sadly, they forget that a woman's worth depends not only on her appearance, but on her feminine intuition and intelligence, as well.

In the early years of her childhood, Wansŏ learned the Korean alphabet from her mother. Afterwards her grandfather, who taught the kids of Pakchk hamlet and other neighboring villages, started educating her after suffering a stroke. He would make her study Chinese writing by learning from "*The Thousand Character Classic*. […] [Which fortunately had] the Korean alphabet written in, glossing the pronunciation of each character"[28]. Therefore, we find out that her mother and grandfather educated Wansŏ in the spirit of the noble women of Chosŏn, who were granted this kind of education in order to become wise yangban wives and be able to entertain their husbands and his guests with the art of communication.

Throughout the text we notice that Wansŏ, like any other girl her age, begins to unfold her gender scenario through feminine intuition by making "bridal dolls out of grass, wind[ing] their hair into buns, and hold[ing] mock wedding festivals"[29]. In this scene "the little girl coddles her doll and dresses her up as she dreams of being coddled and dressed up herself; inversely, she thinks of herself as a marvelous doll"[30].

Wansŏ's mother "grew up in the countryside among her father's extended family"[31] and later "spent time in Seoul with her cousins, who were then students at respected girls' high schools"[32]. Here, she learned han'gŭl. After living for a while in Seoul and being educated herself, she realized that those "who [receive] a modern education and [wear] a Western skirt and Western shoes"[33] can grow up to become the "new women" and can also become successful

[25] Wansŏ Pak, *op.cit*., *p.*1.
[26] *Ibidem.*
[27] Woo Keong Ja, "The Beauty Complex and the Cosmetic Surgery Industry", *Korean Journal*, nr2/2004pp. 52-53, accessed September 7, 2013, http://www.ekoreajournal.net/issue/view_pop.htm?Idx=3297.
[28] Wansŏ Pak, *op.cit*., p.19
[29] *Ibidem*, p.17.
[30] Simone de Beauvoir, *op.cit.*, p.293.
[31] Wansŏ Pak, *op.cit*., p.11.
[32] *Ibidem.*
[33] *Ibidem.*

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)

wives. Hence, she decided to bring her children to Seoul, thinking they could have a better future, as modern Koreans.

Unfortunately, initially, the mother took only the brother to Seoul, since the family did not have much money and it would be easier for a boy to get a good job after graduating from a commercial school. A third reason for taking only her son to Seoul was that the grandfather was against sending his grandchildren to Seoul. He was also opposed to sending his grandson to a commercial school in Seoul when "there was a similar school in Songdo"[34], namely in the vicinity of their village. But the boy would have the chance to get a civil service job by graduating school in the capital and this thought softened the grandfather and made him respect the wishes of his daughter-in-law.

When her mother returned to take Wansŏ to school in Seoul, her grandfather and grandmother started a big quarrel[35], because they did not see the meaning of giving Wansŏ further education. They wanted her to act only as a traditional Korean woman who marries in order to strengthen the bonds between different elite families. Although the grandfather had taught his niece some basic literary knowledge, he did not perceive the need for extensive education, as he felt that women have to respect the "threefold obedience" law and should not try to become equal to men. But in the end her mother managed to take her to Seoul in order to transform her into a "new woman".

The first thing that she did to her daughter in this process of transformation was to give her a bob haircut by chopping off her beautiful long hair, which took years to grow, hours to groom and reflected "how well valued she was at home"[36]. Through this action, Wansŏ's mother started the transformation of her daughter from a future traditional woman seen only as an object, into a "new woman" who could sustain herself. Moreover, the bob was considered a symbol of feminine rebellion "which radically departed from previous long feminine styles and indicated the start of changes in social norms and values […] [from] 1920"[37].

The bob haircut was only the first step of Wansŏ's transformation. Afterwards, during her trip to Seoul she had to adjust to the new life that had been waiting for her in the city very rapidly, which made her voyage similar to a journey of initiation. She had to get used to the fact that**,** unlike her village, big cities like Seoul and Songdo had houses with glass windows and people who traveled by trains.

Unfortunately, even in those times, life in Seoul was not easily managed. Since they were poor, the family had to live in a rented room in the suburbs, which were actually considered somewhat luxurious accommodations. Therefore, their mother had to work very hard. In order to be able to go to Maedong Elementary School, a good school run by Japanese teachers, Wansŏ had to say that she lived with a relative in Seoul and was not supposed to interact with her classmates so as to avoid attracting unnecessary attention that would force her to drop out of school.

Even though the mother made a lot of sacrifices for her daughter, she also wanted Wansŏto not make her presence felt in order to avoid having trouble with her landlord, who had

[34]*Ibidem,* p.10.
[35]*Ibidem, pp.*28-29.
[36]*Ibidem,* p.29.
[37] Robert J. McMurtrie, "Bobbing for power: an exploration into the modality of hair", *Visual Communication Journal,* nr.4/2010, p. 414, accessed September 7, 2013, 118.97.187.12/pustaka/files/14665/jurnal/bobbing-for-power-an-exploration-into-the-modality-of-hair-visual-communication-journal-vol-9-4-2010.pdf.

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)

childrend of the same age[38]. In addition, her mother asked her to: not play with those children inside the house, not stare at them when they ate and not touch their toys[39]. However tough the rules may have seemed, she only wanted to protect her family from being thrown out of the room. Wansŏ, unaware of her mother's thought process, used to see these rules as a punishment meant to condemn her to isolation.

According to Simone de Beauvoir "the daughter is for the mother at once her double and another person, the mother is at once overwhelmingly affectionate and hostile toward her daughter; she saddles her child with her own destiny: a way of proudly laying claim to her own femininity and also a way of revenging herself for it"[40]. Through these words we can understand that even Wansŏ's mother saw in her daughter her own double and a representative of the "new women" class. She pushed her daughter into isolation and into a hostile environment so as to transform her into the woman she had wished to become but could not.

Unlike Wansŏ's mother's enthusiasm that her daughter could go to school, Wansŏ was actually disappointed, because she could not make any friends and had to learn Japanese instead of Korean. Only in the fifth grade was she able to become friends with a transfer student, Pok-sun. After they were assigned as seat-mates at the same desk, they started going to the Public Library and reading story books there[41]. But after graduating from primary school, they parted ways and went on to study at different middle schools.

As a result of her visits to the library, Wansŏ managed to improve her knowledge extensively by reading not only the compulsory works from Japanese and Korean literature, but also the canonical books from Western literature, like *Quo Vadis*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Faust*, *Anna Karenina*, *War and Peace*, *Resurrection*, and others. This passion for reading indicates a change in the Korean woman's mentality and points out that she has slowly shifted from the old model to a new way of living and experiencing entertainment.

Pok-sun became a close friend and a good companion, who helped Wansŏ escape the isolation imposed by her mother, and this connection might have been brought about by the fact that they were both poor and could understand each other easier. Although she lived within the city gates, Pok-sun dwelled in a small house with her parents, grandmother, brother and sisters[42]. Even so, Wansŏ did not pity her, but respected her sincerely and learnt how to be kind and keep a low profile from her.

Unlike Pok-sun, who can be considered her mirror-image, Wansŏ loved and respected her Japanese female teacher because she was an example "of what Mother meant by a New Woman. She was beautiful and smelled nice. All the children loved her. […] She was kind [and strict], doing her best to dispense her attention and affection fairly among the children"[43], the embodiment of what her mother wished Wansŏ to become.

Although the Japanese teachers were strict with the girls, even placing the students with lower grades in "pairs […] [to] face each other and smack the other's cheek until she told them to stop"[44], they would do so in order to increase their competitive spirit. Contrary to common belief, they were actually much stricter with the boys, who were supposed to be as close to

[38] Wansŏ Pak, *op.cit.*, p.39.
[39] *Ibidem.*
[40] Simone de Beauvoir, *op.cit.*, pp.295-296.
[41] Wansŏ Pak, *op.cit.*, pp.121-122.
[42] *Ibidem, p.*120.
[43] *Ibidem, p.*61.
[44] *Ibidem, p.*129.

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)

perfection as possible. This shows that despite being "more and more normal to encourage the young girl to get an education, to devote herself to sports; […] lack of success in these fields is more and more readily pardoned in her than in a boy"[45].

At one time, when Wansŏ was getting ready to go on vacation to her grandparents, her mother dressed her up in the new Western-style with a blouse and a skirt made from "a scrap of white fabric with navy blue polka dots"[46] in order to show them that their granddaughter is on the way to becoming a career woman, i.e. a "new woman". Once again, it highlightsthe image ofwoman as a socio-cultural construction[47], because the new Korean woman, like the medieval woman, has to learn from her parents or from society how to dress or how to act like a woman.

Her mother does not only want her daughter to become a "new woman", but also tries to be her model. As a widow, she works day and night, in order to make up for her husband's absence and manage to afford the luxury of sending her children to school. When her son falls in love, she accepts his son's ill wife[48], because she wants to prove she is a "new woman" who accepts marriage out of love and does not impose an arranged marriage.

Unfortunately, after the Japanese retreat, her family, who started doing well due to the brother's and uncle's jobs in the service of the Japanese Empire, drops back into poverty. This was caused by the nationalist Koreans, who took everything from them as punishment for being collaborators with the Japanese power. Moreover, a few years later, during the Korean War, they were forced to help the communist army without any profit. Later on, when the American and South Korean forces conquered Seoul, they were tagged "Red bastard [and] Red bitch"[49] and her uncle was put on trial and sentenced to death.

Wansŏ wrote this autobiographical novel in order to "testify […] to all the hours [she had to] suffer as a worm"[50] and to lay out all the injustices she had to endure in order to survive.

She should be considered a role model by contemporary girls and especially by the new generations of Korean girls, because she became the "new woman" by undergoing a strict educational program and experiencing the hardships of those times, and in all that time she persevered and maintained her dignity as a woman.

The traumatized woman

After offering a model of the "new woman" in her autobiographical novel *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?*, in *Three Days in That Autumn*, the author tries to depict the realities of postwar Seoul, where irresponsible American soldiers have sex with local girls and prostitutes leaving them pregnant. In this situation, doctors would advise them to abort in order to help these girls keep their "pedigree" as good women, since an unmarried woman with a child was considered an abnormality in the Korean society.

The story depicts a well-educated girl who "graduated from a women's medical school before war"[51] and opened her personal clinic specialized in obstetrics and gynecology after the Korean War. At first, she thought she would only help women by performing abortions, but her

[45] Simone de Beauvoir, *op.cit.*, p.296.
[46] Wansŏ Pak, *op.cit.*, p.79.
[47] Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: feminism and subversion of identity,* Routledge, New York, 1999, p.11.
[48] Wansŏ Pak, *op.cit.*, p.*153.*
[49]*Ibidem,* p.234.
[50]*Ibidem,* p.248.
[51]Wansŏ Pak, "Three Days in That Autumn", trans. Ryu Sukhee, in *My Very Last Possession and other stories,* M.E. Sharpe, New York, 1999, *p.*156.

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)

first surgery was in fact a delivery, which would mark her entire career. Later on, each time she remembered her first delivery, she would feel pangs of conscience and come to regret the multiple abortions she performed daily.

Her father's present, "a framed copy of the Hippocratic oath"[52], and the three calluses on her hand would also be daily reminders that she was a murderer who had "killed enough people to populate a town"[53]. This did not stop her from killing the unborn babies because nobody had ever asked her about her actions and her pangs of conscience were not deep enough. This passage denotes the reason we need medical ethical codes and why we should define the acceptable cases of legal abortion, because this might prevent good doctors from performing abortions at the pleas of poor women who do not have the financial resources to raise a love child.

Unfortunately, the laws in South Korea were not enforced although the "Maternal and Child Health Law was passed in 1973 by a martial law authority permitting abortions with the consent of a woman and her spouse in cases of hereditary defects in the foetus, certain infectious diseases, when a pregnancy resulted from rape or incest, or when pregnancy is deemed to be detrimental to the health of the mother"[54]. Annually, a great number of mothers resorted to abortion even though, in accordance with the law, they were not allowed. Consequently, Pak Wansŏ's story does not remain a simple account, but becomes a complex moralizing story, wherein "her answers are never simple and she is as critical of women's attitudes towards each other as she is about men's callous treatment of women"[55].

Most of the time, men are unjust, and do not understand women's needs, like in the case of Hwang who does not understand the role of a modern woman's clinic in an obscure residential district[56]. He thinks that since a rape has not existed in his family, cases like a prostitute with an unwanted pregnancy, or a fetus with malformations are highly unlikely. However, he is wrong and when his daughter returns home pregnant, he becomes aware of the realities for female existence. Had he known earlier that his daughter had been raped, he would have helped her abort.

From a radical feminist's perspective, the mother should have the right to decide if she wants to abort or give birth to her baby, but this is also a problematic topic, because in some cases, when the fetus is in the last months of growing, having an abortion may be likened to murder. Nevertheless, the case of a Korean single woman who gets pregnant and wants to abort is controversial considering that authorities and doctors would tell her to carry the pregnancy to term, no matter what and to endure societal disapproval. She would also have to support herself without the help of the government, in a society where women who get pregnant lose all their working opportunities[57].

---

[52]*Ibidem*, p.162.
[53]*Ibidem*, p.169.
[54] Andrea Whittaker, "Abortion in Asia: An Overview", in *Abortion in Asia: Local Dilemmas, Global Politics*, ed. Andrea Whittaker, Berghahn Books, New York, 2010, p. 18, accessed September 9, 2013, http://books.google.ro/books?id=zXejroo2NCMC&pg=PA18&dq=abortion+south+korea&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KzkvUuSlAYjJhAfOx4GYCw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=abortion%20south%20korea&f=false.
[55] Helen Koh, *op.cit., p.*40.
[56]Wansŏ Pak, "Three Days in That Autumn", ed.cit., p.160.
[57]Harald Olsen, "Controversial Book on Abortion in South Korea Triggers Debate", *Korea Bang*, March 13, 2013, accessed September 9, 2013, http://www.koreabang.com/2013/stories/controversial-book-on-abortion-in-south-korea-triggers-debate.html.

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)

Still, unlike other stories that touch on the issue of abortion, there are two visions concerning this matter in *Three Days in That Autumn*. On one hand, the narrator paints a vivid picture of poor women who cannot afford to live as single women raising a child and takes pity on them. On the other hand, it emphasizes the idea that the doctor might be a criminal who has forgotten their Hippocratic Oath and that "medicine has been considered a humanitarian art"[58].

If we take into consideration the perspective of the doctor as a criminal, we can say that the ending brings a rightful punishment to the cruel doctor, who wants her last procedure to be a delivery after killing hundreds of fetuses. However, when she delivers the baby of a young patient, she goes crazy and thinks that it is hers. Therefore, she runs in the streets with "her" dead baby and tries to get to a hospital in a desperate attempt to save his life.

Three Days in That Autumn is a realistic, complex, brutal but moralizing story depicting the stark realities of Korean society, where single women who give birth are seen as the dregs of society, while those who abort are considered frivolous women who fall for men too easy. The story is ingeniously constructed so as to criticize both Korean society and the doctors who help women abort even though they should not.

In the end, we may say that Pak Wansŏ offered not only a realistic depiction of women's issues in Korean society, but also a strong critique against the Korean patriarchal system. Moreover, she expanded the "awareness of women's issues"[59], a subject that had been widely neglected. As previously mentioned, through her texts, Pak Wansŏ illustrated the way Korean women are viewed as an overlooked being who should fit a certain type, both in the past and at present.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex*, David Campbell Publishers, London, 1993.

Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* Routledge, New York, 1999.

Epstein, Stephan J., Introduction to *Who Ate Up All the Shinga? : An Autobiographical Novel*, by Pak Wansŏ, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009, pp. vii-xiv.

Chun, Kyung-Ja, Introduction to *My Very Last Possession and Other Stories by Pak Wansŏ,* by Pak Wansŏ, M.E. Sharpe, New York, 1999, p. vii-xiii.

Jang, Sung-eun, „Beloved Korean Novelist Dies At 80", *Korea Real Time*, January 26, 2010, accessed August 19, 2013, http://blogs.wsj.com/korearealtime/2011/01/26/beloved-female-novelist-died-at-80.

Junebong, Shin, „Interview", *list_Books from Korea, nr.* 5/2009, p. 29-31.

Keong Ja, Woo, "The Beauty Complex and the Cosmetic Surgery Industry", *Korean Journal*, nr.2/2004 pp. 52-82, accessed September 7, 2013, http://www.ekoreajournal.net/issue/view_pop.htm?Idx=3297.

Koh, Helen, "Women and Korean Literature", in *Getting to Know Korea: Resource Book for K-12 Educators*, ed. Katrin A. Fraser, The Korean Society, New York, 2002, pp.35-41.

McMurtrie, Robert J., "Bobbing for power: an exploration into the modality of hair", *Visual Communication Journal,* nr.4/2010, p.399- 424, accessed September 7, 2013, 118.97.187.12/pustaka/files/14665/jurnal/bobbing-for-power-an-exploration-into-the-modality-of-hair-visual-communication-journal-vol-9-4-2010.pdf.

[58]Wansŏ Pak, "Three Days in That Autumn", ed.cit., p.162.
[59] Helen Koh, *op.cit., p.*40.

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)

Olsen, Harald, "Controversial Book on Abortion in South Korea Triggers Debate", *Korea Bang*, March 13, 2013, accessed September 9, 2013, http://www.koreabang.com/2013/stories/controversial-book-on-abortion-in-south-korea-triggers-debate.html.

Pak, Wansŏ, "Three Days in That Autumn", trans. Ryu Sukhee, in *My Very Last Possession and Other Stories*, M.E. Sharpe, New York, 1999.

Idem, *Who Ate Up All the Shinga? : An Autobiographical Novel*, trans. Yu Young-Nan and Stepham J. Epstein, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009

Rosenlee, Li-Hsiang Lisa, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2006.

Whittaker, Andrea, "Abortion in Asia: An Overview", in *Abortion in Asia: Local Dilemmas, Global Politics*, ed. Andrea Whittaker, Berghahn Books, New York, 2010, p. 1-38, accessed September 9, 2013, http://books.google.ro/books?id=zXejroo2NCMC&pg=PA18&dq=abortion+south+korea&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KzkvUuSlAYjJhAfOx4GYCw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=abortion%20south%20korea&f=false.

BDD-A28692 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:01:05 UTC)